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SUBJECT: GAM FOUNDER DI TIRO: ACEH PARTY POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

Ref: Jakarta 1902

11. (SBU) Summary. Free Aceh Movement (GAM) founder Hasan di Tiro, who returned to Aceh on October 11 in an historic visit some 30 years after he went into exile (reftel), continued his tour of Aceh by visiting the graves of GAM fighters and attending numerous public events including a large rally in Lhokseumawe on October 18. 83-year old di Tiro remains frail and has refrained from making any lengthy comments to the public or media during his visit, relying instead on surrogates from within the GAM movement. Increasingly, his activities are being viewed as a political tool of the GAM-founded Aceh Party to bolster support leading up to local elections in April, 2009. While di Tiro himself maintains his commitment to the 2005 Helsinki MoU that brought an end to the conflict in Aceh and his visit has gone forward without incident, Aceh Party supporters are also testing the limits of police and military tolerance of their party's flag as a political symbol. The ninth meeting of the Committee on Sustaining Peace in Aceh (CoSPA) October 18 featured a litany of alleged violations on the part of Aceh Party supporters presented by the military and police. End Summary.

12. (U) On October 17 Hasan di Tiro concluded 4 days of events in his home district of Pidie with a visit to his childhood school. In the days prior he went to the location of his 1976 announcement of the GAM movement, and visited the grave of Tengku Abdullah Syaffiie, a luminary of the GAM movement who coordinated GAM military activity until he was killed in 2002. Di Tiro added visits to the burial sites of other senior GAM soldiers to his itinerary. On October 18 di Tiro departed for neighboring Bireun district to see sites where he had stayed prior to fleeing Indonesia. Many locals reportedly reacted emotionally to his presence and the roads were, according to media reports, lined with his supporters. Indonesian police supported the security for his activities without incident.

Crowds Flock to see di Tiro  
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13. (U) At midday on October 18 di Tiro attended an event in Desa Kubu with former GAM "Prime Minister" Malikh Makhmud, former GAM commander Muzakkir Manaf, and Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf. Di Tiro reiterated his call for all Achenese to maintain the peace in Aceh through a statement again read surrogate Malikh Makhmud. From Desa Kubu the group proceeded to Lhokseumawe and North Aceh past roadsides again packed with people who had come to see the 30-car convoy pass. In the town of Lhokseumawe crowds estimated at some

2,000 people gathered at a field to hear di Tiro speak. Once again the speech was read by Malikh Makhmud, and local religious leaders also arrived and publicly gave their support to di Tiro. During the following public prayer several KPA (Aceh Transition Committee organization for ex-GAM) members formed a line and held up a banner asking for "political prisoners" held by the central government to be freed. The banner was up for only a few seconds and was rolled up prior to the end of the prayer.

Praise for SBY, Kalla

14. (U) di Tiro continued his tour of areas in Aceh by meeting crowds at a rally in Peruelak on Sunday, October 19. In remarks read for him by former GAM "Foreign Minister" Zaini Abdullah he mentioned special thanks to Aceh Monitoring Mission Chairman Peter Faith, former Finnish President Marthi Ahtisaari, the U.S. government, Japanese government, and all others in the international community who supported the 2005 Helsinki MoU. Di Tiro also thanked the Indonesian government and especially recognized President Yudhoyono and Vice President Kalla. The speech also urged groups who are against the MoU to think with "rational and cool heads" and follow di Tiro's advice to stay together and maintain peace with the others. Di Tiro was also quoted by the media on October 18 saying that "the sacrifices made during the war were tremendous, but the sacrifices needed to keep the peace are greater still. Thus, I urge all Acehnese to think about Aceh together to reach a better more prosperous future."

Health Concerns Remain

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15. (SBU) Questions continue to be raised about the state of di Tiro's health. According to GAM member Fauzi, di Tiro's nephew, he is unable to speak in long sentences, usually simply replying yes or no and nodding or shaking his head. Fauzi told Consulate Medan during the 9th CoSPA meeting on October 18 that the inner circle of GAM monitors di Tiro's contacts and screens him from outsiders. An Aceh Reconstruction Agency (BRR) government contact from Lhokseumawe said that access badges are provided for those who wanted to see di Tiro but that it is very hard to set any schedule to speak with him. The Chief of North Aceh Police, Zulkifli, confirmed Fauzi's statement regarding di Tiro's isolation. Media reports from the October 19 event in Pereulak (para 4) characterized di Tiro as "visibly exhausted".

Government Concerned over Aceh Party

16. (SBU) Local police and military commanders from northern Aceh openly questioned the motives of the Aceh Party in the lead-up and execution of di Tiro's visit to Aceh at the 9th CoSPA meeting attended by an observer from Consulate Medan in Lhokseumawe on October 18. They provided photographic evidence of the Aceh Party repainting a small bridge in the party's colors, flying the party flag above the Indonesian flag, and local politicians putting Aceh Party logos on state vehicles. Military and police attending the meeting, along with the Jakarta-based Forum for Communication and Coordination (FKK) added that di Tiro's visits and entourage consisting of GAM "commanders" calls into question the sincerity of the organization to renounce armed conflict and transform itself into a purely political movement through the Aceh Party.

17. (SBU) During the CoSPA on October 18 participants also discussed the reason for the cancellation of the proposed meeting between Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla and Hasan di Tiro. A letter from GAM inviting Kalla to meet di Tiro in Aceh was circulated at the meeting, depicting the GAM letterhead from Stockholm, Sweden but signed in Banda Aceh. The assertion of the FKK participants was that this was found to be offensive enough to Kalla for him to cancel the proposed meeting. FKK members also expressed how the list of violations indicated was eroding confidence in the Aceh peace process and undermining the argument that GAM was committed to transitioning to purely political processes and giving up

separatism.